



## **Thematic Analysis on ASIIN Accreditation Experiences in Kazakhstan (20.11.2025)**

### **Scope and Analytical Approach**

This thematic analysis is based on ASIIN's experience from approximately 130 accreditation procedures conducted at higher education institutions in Kazakhstan since 2010, predominantly in the fields of engineering and natural sciences. A complete list of ASIIN-accredited programs in Kazakhstan can be found on the official website: <http://www.asiin-ev.de/pages/de/asiin/akkreditierung-studiengaenge/akkreditierte-studiengaenge.php>

The analysis aggregates recurring observations across institutions and disciplines in order to identify overarching patterns related to programme design, implementation and quality assurance. In line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the analysis focuses on systemic characteristics and trends rather than individual accreditation decisions.

For contextualization purposes, the analysis begins with an outline of the education system in Kazakhstan.

### **Overview of the Education System in Kazakhstan**

According to the nature of educational programs, the education in Kazakhstan is divided into general and vocational education. There are following levels of education: preschool education and training, secondary education, higher and postgraduate education.

#### **Secondary education in Kazakhstan**

Secondary education in Kazakhstan is mandatory and includes general secondary, primary and secondary vocational education. For the first grade 6-7 years, old children are accepted. Secondary education in Kazakhstan has three stages: primary (1-4 grades), basic (5-9 grades) and senior (10-11 grades). For the fullest development of the potential opportunities of educational programs that are implemented in special schools are developed for gifted children.

Primary vocational education in Kazakhstan is acquired in 2-3 years in vocational schools and professional lyceums based on general higher education. Secondary vocational education is provided for 3-4 years in colleges and schools based on general education on a competitive basis.

### **Higher Education in Kazakhstan**

Higher Education in Kazakhstan is acquired based on secondary education. School-leavers pass final and entrance exams in the form of a unified national test (UNT) or complex testing (for school-leavers of previous years) for admission to the university. Kazakh citizens on a competitive basis have the right to be awarded the international "Bolashak" scholarship to study abroad. After graduating HEI graduate receives a bachelor's degree (4 years). Second higher education in Kazakhstan is conducted only on a fee basis with accelerated training period of training (2-3 years).

### **Postgraduate education in Kazakhstan**

To receive a postgraduate education in Kazakhstan it is necessary a bachelor's or master's degree. Training of scientific personnel is conducted in master and PhD doctoral education of universities. Kazakh citizens on a competitive basis have the right to be awarded the international "Bolashak" scholarship to study abroad. The duration in master education does not exceed 2 years, in PhD doctoral - 3 years.

In the Republic of Kazakhstan higher education institutions may be public and private, and are not autonomous institutions of education. Nazarbayev University is recognized as an autonomous institution of education; however, its legal status does not equate to the degree of institutional independence and academic freedom characteristic of German higher education institutions.

Educational services in the field of higher and postgraduate education are provided on a paid and budget basis. Budget funding is provided by placing the state educational order in the form of educational grants in the universities of differentially depending on the specialty, type and status of the institution.

Universities are divided into national research universities, national higher educational institutions, research universities, universities, academies, institutes and related institutions (conservatory, high school).

### **Degrees and qualifications**

Degrees and qualifications in higher education and post-graduate education are awarded in accordance with the level of National framework of qualifications of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which is comparable to the European framework of qualifications.

## **Thematic Analysis**

### **Systemic Context and Quality Development**

Across accreditation procedures, Kazakhstan's higher education system can be characterised as being in an ongoing transformation from (post-)Soviet structures towards more internationally oriented academic and quality assurance frameworks. Formal internal quality assurance structures are generally in place, and institutions engage constructively with external accreditation processes. However, the extent to which these structures are effectively implemented and embedded varies considerably between institutions, and quality assurance often continues to function primarily as a compliance mechanism rather than as a driver of continuous improvement.

Many of the larger universities increasingly position themselves as research-oriented institutions, yet research capacities remain uneven across disciplines. In several fields, limitations in financial and human resources as well as laboratory infrastructure persist. By contrast, geosciences, reflecting their national strategic importance, are frequently very well equipped and in some cases comparable to, or exceeding, German standards.

Despite notable improvements in English language skills at all institutional levels, the quality of English-language documentation remains inconsistent, with translations of key accreditation documents often lacking sufficient clarity and precision. Overall, the additionally observed transformation towards international alignment is evident but progresses at different speeds and levels of depth across institutions and disciplines.

### **ASIIN Criterion 1: Degree Programme Concept, Content and Implementation**

A recurring thematic issue concerns the internal coherence of programme concepts and their documentation. Intended learning outcomes and qualification objectives are generally defined, but their presentation is often inconsistent across self-assessment reports, programme regulations, diploma supplements and institutional websites. The alignment between learning outcomes, curriculum structure and assessment methods is therefore not always transparent.

Engineering and applied science programmes are frequently designed in close alignment with regional labour market and industry needs. This results in a strong practical orientation, particularly at Bachelor level. While this approach supports employability, it may in some cases reduce theoretical depth and academic progression, with implications for international comparability and preparation for further academic study. Systematic data on graduates' career paths and labour-market outcomes are often limited, which restricts the ability of institutions to demonstrate the effectiveness of programme outcomes.

The implementation of the credit system represents a further recurring challenge. The conversion from the national credit system, which is largely based on contact hours, to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is often only partially transparent.

Student workload is not consistently surveyed, and discrepancies between assigned credits and actual workload are regularly observed. Student mobility remains low across institutions, with limited financial support and regionally concentrated partnerships mostly with universities in Russia and Eastern Europe. While formal rules for the recognition of external credits are increasingly established, their application is not always consistent or sufficiently transparent from a student perspective.

### **ASIIN Criterion 2: Examination System, Concept and Organisation**

Assessment practices across institutions continue to rely predominantly on traditional written examinations. Alternative assessment formats that would support a broader competency-oriented approach are rarely used. As a result, assessment systems do not always fully reflect the intended learning outcomes of the programmes.

This pattern is also reflected in the quality of final theses, which varies considerably across institutions and disciplines. In a number of cases, Bachelor's and Master's theses do not consistently meet international expectations with regard to methodological rigour, academic depth and independence. This indicates a need for clearer assessment criteria, stronger supervision structures and more systematic quality assurance of final assessment components.

### **ASIIN Criterion 3: Resources**

Resource-related issues remain a recurring theme, particularly in technical disciplines. Laboratory infrastructure is often only partially aligned with current technological and safety standards, and limitations in capacity, equipment and safety provisions are frequently observed. At the same time, significant disciplinary differences can be identified. In fields of national strategic importance, such as the geosciences, facilities are often well developed and in some cases comparable to, or exceeding, European benchmarks.

Academic staff structures are undergoing a generational transition. A substantial proportion of senior academic staff were educated under the Soviet system and hold qualifications that differ from Western academic career models. For instance, there are still many "candidates" (equivalent to PhD holders) who have been teaching and researching at a university for decades but do not hold professorship status. Younger academic staff increasingly demonstrate a stronger orientation towards internationalisation and pedagogical development. However, these developments are not yet systematically embedded at institutional level, and structured staff development remains uneven.

### **ASIIN Criterion 4: Transparency and Documentation**

Transparency of programme-related information remains a recurring challenge in accreditation procedures. English language versions of self-assessment reports, programme regulations and module descriptions often lack sufficient clarity, completeness or consistency.

Programme-specific information is not always fully available in English on institutional websites, which limits transparency for international stakeholders and peer reviewers.

In addition, documentation practices differ from common European conventions. Programme content is often described through individual syllabi rather than comprehensive module handbooks, and modules are commonly referred to as “disciplines”. These practices can hinder clarity, comparability and the consistent communication of programme structures and learning outcomes, particularly in an international context.

### **ASIIN Criterion 5: Quality Management and Quality Development**

Internal quality assurance systems are generally established at Kazakh higher education institutions. However, their use as instruments for systematic quality development remains uneven. While formal procedures exist, feedback mechanisms such as student and alumni surveys are not applied consistently across institutions and programmes. In many cases, evaluation results are not yet systematically linked to programme development and strategic decision-making.

Overall, quality assurance is still frequently perceived as a procedural requirement rather than as an integral element of institutional governance and continuous improvement. The further development of a shared quality culture, supported by transparent feedback loops and evidence-based decision-making, remains a key area for future progress.

### **Conclusion**

Taken together, the thematic patterns observed across accreditation procedures indicate that Kazakhstan’s higher education system has made substantial progress in establishing formal structures and engaging with international quality assurance standards. At the same time, challenges remain with regard to coherence, implementation depth and the consolidation of a quality culture. Strengthening coherence and transparency with regard to the content and formal aspects of the programmes, improving clarity of workload and assessment practices, expanding international mobility and recognition mechanisms, and further embedding quality assurance as a strategic, participatory process would support the sustainable development of quality in all institutions.